# AN INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE CROWN OVER PARLIAMENT.

SUBMITTED TO THE

Conſideration of the Electors of GREAT BRITAIN.

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In ſe magna ruunt, lætis hunc numina rebus
Creſcendi poſuere modum. *Lucan.*

*Il y a des cauſes generales, ſoit morales ſoit phyſiques, qui agiſſent dans chaque monarchie, l'elevent, la maintiennent, ou la precipitent.* Monteſquieu.

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

# THE EARL TEMPLE,

A YOUNG NOBLEMAN,

WHOSE PUBLIC CONDUCT AND DOMESTIC LIFE

GIVE A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THOSE VIRTUES

WHICH ALONE, AT THIS AWFUL MOMENT, CAN

SAVE HIS COUNTRY,

THE FOLLOWING INQUIRY

IS MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED,

BY ONE WHO HAS NOT THE HONOUR

OF BEING KNOWN TO HIS LORDSHIP,

OR OF KNOWING HIM,

BUT BY HIS EXCELLENT CHARACTER,

WHICH CLAIMS THE RESPECT

OF EVERY HONEST MAN.

LONDON,
SEPT. 4, 1780.

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Sept. 1, 1760.

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## PART I.

MOST governments, perhaps it might be ſaid all governments, if conſidered only in the theory, will ſeem to have been conſtituted on wiſe principles, and calculated to anſwer their proper end, the ſafety of the people governed. Their happineſs will appear to have been the ultimate object, whether the form be monarchical or republican; whether that monarchy be limited or deſpotic, hereditary

or elective: whether, if republican, it be ariſtocratical, democratical, or mixt: in a word, no legiſlator could be ſo abſurd as to eſtabliſh an inſtitution profeſſedly deſtructive of his ſubjects. Hence the philoſopher may infer, that the modes of government are all indifferent; and that the preference of one to another depends, ſolely, on the ſpirit and efficacy with which its powers are exerted.

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" For forms of government let fools conteſt,
" Whate'er is beſt adminiſter'd is beſt.

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And, indeed, this is what in ſpeculation all muſt allow; and yet it is equally obvious, if we look into practice and fact, that each of theſe inſtitutions or forms is liable to ſome great and peculiar evil, originating from its conſtructio., and congenial with it. Is the gov.rnment a republic of any diſtinction, in which the powers are divided among many citizens of equal rank? Such a diſtribution may guard

guard the rights and liberties of the people with a jealous eye; but uneaſineſs and bickerings will frequently ariſe from that very jealouſy, which is watchful over their ſafety. Or, however ſmoothly things may go on in times of peace and tranquillity, ſhould foreign wars or domeſtic commotions happen, it will then be neceſſary to throw a greater power into ſome hands, in order to give more energy and vigour to the exertions of government. That very expedient may deſtroy the balance; and ſome popular leader at home may attach thoſe powers to his own perſon, which were entruſted to him for the common ſafety; or, for want of ſuch vigorous defence within, the ſtate will become an eaſy conqueſt to an invader from abroad.

Hence it is evident that monarchy will ſooner or later be eſtabliſhed on the ruins of liberty, or the republic will be ſwallowed up by ſome neighbouring ſtate; un-

leſs it ſink into an inſignificancy which renders it unworthy of notice; or be fortunately preſerved by the jealouſy of rival powers.

As republics change into monarchy, ſo limited monarchy, or mixt government, from the ſame viciſſitude of human affairs, will change into abſolute monarchy or abſolute ariſtocracy; for in fact there are no other but the monarchic or ariſtocratic powers in government. The multitude cannot govern themſelves; it is a ſoleciſm in politics. Now, ſuppoſing a form of government, where the power is divided between a ſole magiſtrate and an hereditary council of nobles; if in ſuch a conſtitution there was, at firſt, juſt weight enough in the ſcale of the nobility to keep the ſovereignty at its proper level; the leaſt addition deſign or accident might give on that ſide, or, which amounts to the ſame thing, if the weakneſs of the prince ſhould be the means of diminiſhing from his ſide, the

equilibrium

equilibrium would be deſtroyed; and the people would be oppreſſed by the nobles; as they were in this country, while the feudal ſyſtem prevailed, till the reign of Henry VII. and as they are actually in Poland.

It was ſaid the multitude cannot govern themſelves; the ſhare they may have in government, which is all that can be meant by a democracy, is for the people to elect their own governors, and to elect them for a limited time. Yet beſides that an ariſtocracy, though not an hereditary one, will be thus formed; every one of theſe meaſures will be liable to abuſe; but eſpecially to the evils ariſing from conteſted elections, from bribery and corruption. If the elections are often repeated, there will be a conſtant ſcene of riot; if they are ſeldom, the deputed powers will probably forget their dependency on their conſtituents, and poſ-

ſibly enlarge the term of their own deputation.

THESE hints are juſt thrown out by way of illuſtrating the poſition, that all forms of government have ſome radical and eſſential imperfection in reality, however perfect they may appear in theory: nor is it poſſible for human wit to invent ſuch an Utopian ſyſtem as ſhall not participate of the common infirmity of human nature. Even if ſome of the wiſeſt and ableſt ſtateſmen, the world ever knew, were to lay the plan of a government *de novo*, for a people abſolutely in their power, it would be impoſſible to project ſuch a plan as ſhould agree with, in every particular, and adapt itſelf through all changes to, the circumſtances, character, and ſituation of that people. Not to go back to ancient times, or to countries, the ſtate of which we are unacquainted with, ſuch plans have of late years been concerted for

ſeveral

ſeveral colonies in America, by the French as well as by the Engliſh; but the moment the application was made of thoſe models, ſo curious in their apparent conſtruction, ſome wheels have been clogged or oppreſſed by too great a weight, unforeſeen impediments have ariſen, and ſtopt the operation of the machine, and the reſult has been loſs and diſappointment, though projected and executed by a Delawar or a De Poincy. In ſhort, it muſt be univerſally granted, becauſe proved by univerſal experience, and aptly expreſt by the ſame metaphor in all languages, that death is as natural to the political as to the animal body; that the one as well as the other has its infancy and its manhood, and, unleſs it dies by violence and accident, will certainly arrive at old age, and a natural decay, following each other in unavoidable ſucceſſion.

'Tis true, men are apt in this caſe, as

well as in that, to be inattentive to the approach of diſſolution, when it comes on by ſtealthy and unperceived degrees: the ſteps are ſo ſlow, that the movement, like that of the hour-hand of a clock, is unnoticed by our eye: and in both inſtances that is true which the poet obſerves in one,

"The hour's unknown, and ſo remote the fear,
"Death ſtills draws near us, never ſeeming near."

But as divines teach us to reflect frequently upon death, in order to prepare ourſelves for it; ſo, perhaps, it may be prudent to conſider the true ſtate of our civil life, that we may ſee what are the efforts neceſſary to avert the fatal change; or meet it, whenever it happens, with patience and philoſophy; and not haſten its arrival, by having recourſe to violent remedies, which will probably be too ſtrong for an enfeebled conſtitution;

conſtitution; and at that period of age when cordials and lenitives only ſhould be applied.

THESE few pages are written to call the attention of the unprejudiced to conſider cooly the late topics of declamation: *The ſhortening the preſent duration of parliaments; the increaſing the number of repreſentatives, and altering the nature of repreſentation; in order to deſtroy the influence of the crown over parliament.* Whence they may judge impartially whether it be practicable, in the preſent ſtate of the nation, and with the preſent habits of the people, to effect any new ſecurities for the continuation of public liberty. Or, whether a thorough change and reformation in the principles of the people be not abſolutely neceſſary to enſure that bleſſing.

WHEN the people, in a conſtitution like this, are looking to ſome great evil which ſeems to call aloud for redreſs, they

ſeldom

ſeldom look beyond the immediate cauſe of it; or perhaps, where there are many conſpiring cauſes, they fix their eye only on that which is moſt conſpicuous, or neareſt, though probably there are others, more latent and remote, which are the real efficient ones. This country has been evidently brought into its preſent unhappy ſituation by the war with America: which is now, perhaps, by all allowed to have been a very *impolitic* meaſure, whatever may be thought of the *juſtice* of it; for it may be granted, the juſtice of the meaſure was by no means a clear point, and honeſt men might eaſily be divided in their opinions concerning it. This deſtructive war, however, was all along ſupported by a decided majority in parliament. Hence thoſe who have been uniformly averſe to it upon principle, conſidering it as unjuſt as well as impolitic, and others who oppoſed it, merely from the ſpirit of party, as a meaſure of the miniſters, have taken occaſion to look to the means whereby

that majority has been obtained to ſupport it. And diſcovering that the influence of the crown has procured a large part of the ſuffrages of the members of parliament, they have come to this general propoſition, that the influence of the crown is too great for the ſafety of the conſtitution, and ought to be diminiſhed.

THE next ſtep was to propoſe the methods to diminiſh it; and here a variety of opinions have ariſen: One party wiſhes to introduce triennial, another annual, parliaments; theſe may both be conſidered as agreeing in one point, to ſhorten the duration of parliaments; which they look upon as the proper and only effectual remedy for the evil. And it muſt be confeſt, that in caſes of delegated power, in order to ſecure the dependency of the delegates on their conſtituents, it is a plain ſimple axiom in the ſcience of politics, that the entruſted power and the time ſhould be in an inverted ratio; the more the

power,

power, the ſhorter the time. It was not the creating any new power in the ſtate, but, as has been often obſerved, it was departing from this maxim, and lengthening the term of the dictatorial power, as well as uniting many other offices in his own perſon, which enabled Cæſar to overturn the Roman commonwealth under all the forms of law.

After the conceſſion here made, they who propoſe this expedient ſhould conſider, on the other hand, how many inconveniencies muſt neceſſarily ariſe from it. Either the people would become indolent, and not attend to elections; or if they did, conſtant ſcenes of riot and oppoſition would unavoidably enſue. Private fortunes would not be able to ſtand againſt the public purſe in the hands of the miniſter, when conteſts were frequently repeated. Thence there would be danger that the loweſt of the citizens, the very dregs of the people, would be returned, as

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in Cromwell's parliament. The qualification for members is already diſregarded or evaded. Beſides, if the delegates were perpetually changed, and the great officers of ſtate in conſequence, every perſon would be a novice in his poſt, and would hardly know the duties of his office before he muſt quit it. This is ſo evident, it is ſcarcely neceſſary to have recourſe to facts to prove the aſſertion; if it be, the reader may be reminded of a paſſage in Plutarch's life of Cato of Utica. That virtuous citizen, ſays his biographer, when the office of quæſtor fell to him, would not take the place till he had ſtudied the laws concerning it, and enquired of experienced men the duty and authority belonging to it. Being thus inſtructed, he made a great reformation among the clerks and under officers of the treaſury; for they being verſed in the records and methods of the office, into which continually ſucceeded *new* quæſtors, who for their ignorance and unſkilfulneſs were fit only to learn, and not

able

able to manage, the buſineſs, thoſe officers had taken to themſelves all the power, and were, in effect, the treaſurers. Theſe would be the unavoidable evils; and there would be another, perhaps ſtill greater, the want of ſtability in ſuch a government, which would not only prevent purſuing any national object ſteadily; but would prevent alſo its having any connexion with foreign ſtates. For they would never know with what ſet of men they ſhould treat, in a country where all was ſubject to the caprice of the giddy multitude.

These are ſuch ſubſtantial objections againſt the change, not to call it innovation, of introducing annual parliaments, that perhaps no ſober man, who ſees the difficulties attending it, would ſeriouſly propoſe to ſhorten the preſent duration of them.

If the duration of parliaments was reduced to three years, many of the above objections

objections would ſtill remain againſt that term. Private gentlemen would conſider the value of a ſeat for three years, as much leſs than the proportional value of the whole term of ſeven years; which period is calculated in annuities at more than half the beſt life: they would, therefore, as far as perſonal intereſt was the object, be leſs willing to enter into conteſt with miniſters for ſuch a ſeat: conſequently miniſters would more eaſily get ſuch members as were agreeable to them returned: and thoſe perſons would become ſtill more dependent on the miniſters, whom they would look up to as their conſtituents.

The next propoſition carries the appearance of proportioning the weight and influence of electors, according to their real property, by decreaſing the number of repreſentatives for boroughs, and increaſing the number of county members. But this propoſition has been produced in ſo indigeſted a ſtate, it is hardly poſſible to point

point out regular objections to what has yet no regular form.

To proceed, therefore, to the great ſubject of the preſent ſpeculation; in which it is intended to enquire how far parliaments are in themſelves adapted to the actual ſtate of the Britiſh empire: conſidering the great changes in the ſituation of this nation, with reſpect to its manners, and the extent of the dominions of the crown, ſince the inſtitution of parliaments.

PARLIAMENTS are inconteſtably of high antiquity in England, having in effect been as ancient as the feudal or Gothic ſyſtem of government. It is not, however, a conſideration to the preſent purpoſe, whether that ſyſtem was firſt brought in at the Norman conqueſt, or whether it began with our Saxon anceſtors: it is now ſo entirely changed from its original inſtitution, that no inference can be drawn from

from thence applicable to its preſent ſtate.

PARLIAMENT was doubtleſs at firſt the great council of the nation, by whatever name it was called; it conſiſted of thoſe lords or chieftains, who, holding their lands immediately of the crown, as vaſſals or tenants *in capite*, were obliged to attend on the perſon of the king, to aſſiſt him with their advice. This was long conſidered as a duty and ſervice; and it became ſo burdenſome, from many circumſtances, that there are inſtances in the hiſtory of England, of barons renouncing their tenures on account of the attendance annexed to them. Afterwards the method of repreſentation for the leſſer barons, as well as for the burgeſſes in boroughs, was introduced, from conveniency or neceſſity, to relieve the ſubject. This probably happened in the reign of Henry III. It was then natural the conſtituents ſhould pay the expences of the deputy; and this we

know prevailed in England ſo late as to the time of Charles II. Andrew Marvel, who died in 1678, was the laſt member of parliament ſo paid.

HENCE it is obvious, there muſt be ſome material alteration in that ſervice, which, from having been ſo burdenſome, is now become an object of the greateſt ambition, and the occaſion of the greateſt conteſts: nor is it leſs obvious what that alteration is. When the great fiefs began to be divided, and the number of members in the Engliſh parliament increaſed, it was difficult, in the perambulations of the king, to find one room capable of containing them all. They were therefore ſeparated for the convenience of ſitting; and being ſeparated, they were divided into two houſes of parliament; in one of which ſat the great officers of the crown and the hereditary vaſſals; in the other the repreſentatives of the ſmaller barons and burgeſſes.

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THIS accidental ſeparation was productive of ſeparate privileges, and in time of almoſt ſeparate intereſts in the two aſſemblies, from the great alterations which happened from other cauſes afterwards. Nobility, and thoſe diſtinctions which had been territorial and official, became perſonal and honorary. Property ſhifted into the hands of the commons, by the dividing of the grand fiefs, by the alienation of church-lands, and by the progreſs of commerce; and power followed, as it muſt always follow, property. Whatever the high antiquity of parliaments may be, the great influence and power of the houſe of commons is of modern date; the foundation of it was laid in the reign of Henry VII. and the ſuperſtructure was not compleated till Charles the Firſt, or indeed till the Revolution. "The erection of the houſe of "commons in England," ſays a learned Scotch writer *, "whoſe intereſts being

* Dalrymple's Hiſt. of Feudal Property, chap. viii.

" to ſupport the people, were oppoſite to " thoſe of the lords; and the introduc- " tion of the new nobility, who owing " their riſe to the crown, were devoted to " it, tended much to weaken the power " of the antient barons. At an æra when " the commons had riſen upon the ba- " rons, and yet had not quite ſunk them, " ſo that both balanced and weakened " each other, Henry VIII. was the moſt " abſolute monarch that ever ſat on the " Engliſh throne. At an æra when the " commons had riſen both on the king and " the peerage, Charles I. was in a ſtate the " weakeſt that a king of England had ever " been reduced to."

THAT, however, which gave the commons their plenitude of power was not effected till the revolution. The commons had long, though hiſtory does not inform us how long, been in poſſeſſion of the ſole right of taxing the people to raiſe ſupplies*. Theſe

* This right is founded on preſcription. When the greateſt part of the expences of government were ſupported

Theſe aids, after the demeſne lands of the crown had been diſperſed, were the only conſiderable revenues of the ſtate; and they reſolved to grant them but for ſhort terms, to ſecure in ſome meaſure the dependence of the crown upon the people. This effect was counter-acted by the policy of King William. Large ſums were neceſſary for the purpoſes of government: that the burden of taxes might not preſs too heavy on the preſent race, for benefits which would chiefly accrue to poſterity (for ſuch it muſt be confeſt were the glorious views of his reign) it was propoſed to throw a part of the expence alſo on poſterity, by a method of mortgaging the revenue; and on this principle, as every one knows, the mode of funding was eſtabliſhed.

ported by the revenues of the crown, the aids of the people were inconſiderable, and therefore, probably, the lords did not interfere in aſſeſſing them, though they do not now abſolutely allow the excluſive right in the commons.

OUR anceſtors, at the revolution, who had been ſo attentive to paſt grievances, and had guarded againſt their return with ſo much jealous caution, did not foreſee all the conſequences of the propoſed plan. They were led into it from the conſideration of preſent eaſe to themſelves, and of ſecurity and ſtability to the revolution: but they did not ſee, that their faith being plighted for the payment of the intereſt of theſe advanced ſums, their annual ſupplies muſt be increaſed; and that by leaving the collecting and management of all the revenue, with that addition, entirely in the crown, they furniſhed the means of increaſing its influence. It has been obſerved, by ſome writers, that had it been ſtipulated that the commons ſhould ſhare, with the crown, the power of appointing to the various offices ariſing from this enlarged revenue, they would have effectually guarded againſt the increaſing influence of the crown, and have fixt the popular part of the government immove-

ably as on a rock. Had that meaſure been purſued, the crown would indeed have loſt a large ſhare of its influence, but it would have loſt its due weight in the conſtitution too. The government would have ſunk into a republic, perhaps of the worſt conſtruction, becauſe not originally calculated for it; with an hereditary chief magiſtrate, of whom there would have been ſo conſtant a ſuſpicion, that it could not have been poſſible to have conducted the affairs of the ſtate at all.

THUS we ſee the ſource of the great influence of the crown over parliament, was increaſed by the power of collecting and managing ſo vaſt, ſo enormous a revenue: a phenomenon unknown in any ſyſtem of government till modern times, nor could the wiſeſt ſtateſman have demonſtrated *a priori* its aſtoniſhing effect. The great lord treaſurer Burleigh had ſaid, that "England could never be ruined but "by a parliament." He ſaw how abſo-

lute the crown might become with a houſe of commons at its devotion; he ſaw that the weight of the barons was diminiſhing: but perhaps he did not ſee that the weight of the commons was increaſing every day; certainly he did not ſee the means by which the crown would afterwards acquire the abſolute direction of the whole power of the parliament, and turn them all as one man.

THE power of the purſe being in the commons, they had every power of the ſtate at their command; but the more the power veſted in this aſſembly, the more the miniſter could effect by it, if he was once able to manage it. The eſtabliſhed places, at the diſpoſal of the miniſter, which had originated in the Gothic conſtitution, gave him an influence over the members who poſſeſt thoſe places, or deſired them for their friends: and the number of places which were created afterwards, and increaſed by the ſeveral arts of dividing, or

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rather multiplying them, moſt of theſe honourable and profitable, many of them ſine-cures, furniſhed the means of a regular ſyſtem of influence, which perſons in oppoſition have called a ſyſtem of corruption. In Poland, where the feudal government prevails in greater force than in any other ſtate in Europe at this day, the crown has indeed the diſpoſal of moſt places of honour and profit; but to prevent that power from giving too much influence to the crown, it cannot reſume its grants: the diet or parliament only can do that, on complaint of abuſe. Whereas in this country, the miniſter is not obliged even to aſſign a reaſon for reſuming many of the moſt important and lucrative poſts: and the greateſt ſtretch of his condeſcenſion uſually is, to allow thoſe officers to reſign, whom he means to diſmiſs.

A METHOD to diminiſh this influence of the crown was brought forward by a ſenator * of diſtinguiſhed abilities,

* Mr. Burke's bill.

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and it found a large ſhare of popular approbation, as it ſeemed to ſtrike at the very root of the evil complained of. His plan was to aboliſh a great number of thoſe places which created the influence itſelf, and to exclude perſons who held others from ſitting in parliament: but the ſucceſs of his famous bill muſt, to every thinking man, demonſtrate either that the influence is now become ſo great, as to ſupport itſelf againſt any arguments and reaſonable oppoſition; or, that the deſtroying that branch of the royal prerogative would be a breach more dangerous to the conſtitution than any influence ariſing from it.

FORMIDABLE, therefore, as this influence may appear, it is now, by many, thought indiſpenſably neceſſary to give the crown its due weight in the ſtate, and to enable the miniſter to carry on the buſineſs of government; which would otherwiſe be utterly impeded by the oppoſition

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he would meet with from envy, ambition, or avarice. This needs little proof; it is almoſt ſelf-evident. If a miniſter ſhould ariſe, who had abilities to ſee the true intereſt of his country as to its real happineſs, its peace and ſecurity at home, its influence and glory abroad; and ſeeing this, ſhould he have the virtue and perſeverance to purſue it uniformly and indefatigably, employing men the beſt qualified in every department, without favour or reſpect of perſons: ſhould he, ſo far from providing for his own family, either by preſent places or future reverſions, rather renounce the uſual perquiſites of his own poſt, and apply them to the exigencies of the ſtate, being ſatisfied with the honour of his country, in return for all his cares and labours: ſhould ſuch a ſelf-denying miniſter ariſe, it might reaſonably be thought, he would be ſupported by every true lover of his country, and would have no occaſion to bias others, being himſelf unbiaſed and diſintereſted. Should

even

even ſuch a miniſter ariſe, a little reflection will ſhew us that he would not fail to meet with a large ſhare of oppoſition.

His near approach to the throne, the confidence of his Sovereign, and the well-earned praiſe of the people, would excite envy, and create him enemies; thoſe enemies to his perſon, and rivals of his fame, would impede his meaſures, and miſrepreſent his views: even ſome of his friends would begin to think themſelves neglected, or not ſufficiently rewarded, and therefore would have no averſion to a change; for who can eſtimate merit according to the ſtandard of ſelf-love? Or, ſhould ſuch a miniſter be permitted to conduct an arduous and extenſive war, while danger threatened the people, or while glory attended his plan; yet many would ſecretly repine at his ſucceſs, and, by all the little dirty arts of intrigue counteract his deſigns, and drive him from a poſt he could no longer retain, in ſuch circumſtances,

circumſtances, with honour to himſelf, or with advantage to his country.

HAVING thus traced the origin of the influence of the crown, and, from the contemplation of the ordinary motives of human actions, ſhewn ſome reaſons for the neceſſity of it, in a mixed goverment like this: it will be a point of ſerious conſideration, how far it is practicable to decreaſe that influence, and yet enable the miniſter to conduct the national affairs. Or, allowing him the direction of a majority in parliament, whether a deſpotiſm ſo eſtabliſhed may not be more fatal to the liberties of the people, than even an abſolute monarchy. For a parliament devoted to the crown is the moſt powerful engine in the hands of the miniſter, to rivet the fetters of the people.

A SOCIETY is capable of acts which hardly any individual of the whole would acknowledge as his own; becauſe, in that caſe,

caſe, the blame, though avowed, is divided among numbers, and each man excuſes himſelf. A little obſervation on the proceedings of all communities, will confirm this truth. To apply it to the preſent queſtion:—Suppoſe a miniſter ſhould wiſh to ſuſpend the great guard of perſonal liberty, the *habeas corpus* act; might not a parliament under too much influence, eaſily be prevailed on to paſs an act of ſuſpenſion*? perhaps in terms vague and undefined, though the miniſter ſhould give no reaſon for it but ſuſpicion. Should the miniſter wiſh, with a view of carrying on

* The *habeas corpus* act is at this moment ſuſpended, with regard to a large part of the ſubjects of the Britiſh crown. The bill for the act was read in the houſe of commons the third time, Feb. 17, 1777. After a warm debate, and a petition againſt it from the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, &c. of London, it was carried by 112 to 35; yet this act has not once been proceeded on ſince it was paſt, now more than three years. Either, therefore, the miniſter has been more moderate than the parliament, or the act was needleſs in itſelf.

his

his plans, to attack even the property of any ſet of men, would not ſuch a parliament concur with him? When the celebrated act for regulating the Eaſt India company was paſſed *, did not parliament, at the command of the miniſter, deprive the holders of ſtock to the amount of five hundred pounds of their right of voting for directors for the management of their property, according to the original charter under which they purchaſed; and reſtrain that privilege to thoſe who poſſeſſed one thouſand pounds? In anſwer to this, it may be alledged, that when oppoſition lately propoſed to diſqualify † cuſtomhouſe-officers from voting for repreſentatives, and ſuch perſons as were under too much influence to give a free vote, parliament ſtood forth, and expreſſed abhorrence of the bill, as infringing on one of the great privileges of the ſubject, and robbing him of his birth-right. Is it not apparent, other motives than mere love of juſtice might

* In 1773. † Mr. Crewe's bill.

have

have, in the latter inſtance, actuated parliament, which proceeded ſo arbitrarily in the former?

But the American affairs, ſince the beginning of thoſe diſputes, will afford ſtill more ſtriking examples of the obſequiouſneſs to miniſters of parliaments under too much influence. Thoſe proofs are very curious, and may be ſeen at one view in the preambles of ſeveral different acts of parliament with regard to raiſing a revenue in America. Parliament firſt impoſes a tax, then it takes it off; then it impoſes it again, then it takes it off again; all in the ſhort ſpace of five years. Three of theſe contradictory acts were paſſed by the ſame parliament in three ſucceeding years *. When the miniſter has talked of

* See the preambles to 5 Geo. III. chap. 12; 6 Geo. III. ch. 11; 7 Geo. III. ch. 46; and 10 Geo. III. by which all the duties laid on by the laſt-mentioned act, except that on *tea*, are repealed; declaring that *ſuch duties were laid on, contrary to the true principles of commerce.*

coercive

coercive meaſures, has not parliament called aloud for rigour, and unconditional ſubmiſſion, as the means of ſupporting the national honour? When the miniſter propoſed his repentant embaſſy, did not parliament humbly ſue for pardon? — By a parliament under too much influence, a bill may be brought into the houſe of commons at the hour of midnight, in a thin aſſembly, and hurried through both houſes in a ſhort time (to prevent even a petition from being preſented againſt it); to cut off, by that ſingle ſtroke, the ſecurities given by ſeveral former acts of parliament to any particular deſcription of men; and that even with a retroſpective view, to operate before it is enacted *.

Would

* 19 Geo. III. c. 75. An act for removing certain difficulties with reſpect to the more ſpeedy and effectual manning of his Majeſty's navy, for a limited time. *Preamble.* Whereas by ſeveral acts of parliament, perſons under certain deſcriptions are protected from being impreſſed into his Majeſty's ſervice at ſea, &c. This act (the bill for which was brought into the

Would there be any faith or ſecurity in acts of parliament from that moment? Should the militia alledge ſuch an act as a reaſon for their fears of being embodied in the army, what aſſurance could be given them? It is not diſputed that the neceſſity might be urgent; but *neceſſity is the tyrant's plea.* An eaſtern deſpot would not, in the wantonneſs of power, violate the rights of humanity, without the plea of neceſſity, either general, or in the particular inſtance. If four acts of parliament could be ſo eaſily ſet aſide, and one deſcription of perſons oppreſt by ſuch a ſtretch of power, what can reſiſt *the omnipotence of parliament*, to uſe their favourite phraſe? And where is freedom and ſe-

Houſe by Mr. Wedderburn, the attorney-general, exactly in the manner above repreſented) ſets aſide four acts of parliament, and was paſſed in the *end* of June 1779. It annihilated the protections of the perſons deſcribed, from the 16th day of that month; the day the Spaniſh ambaſſador delivered in his manifeſto.

curity,

curity, if the miniſter can arbitrarily command that power?

It may be ſaid, the genuine conſtitution of this government gives the legiſlative power to the three eſtates, and the executive to the crown alone. The old maxim, *that the king can do no wrong*, is founded on the principle, that the miniſters are accountable to parliament. If the ſovereign ordered meaſures prejudicial to the conſtitution, the miniſter ſhould execute them at the hazard of his head. This is the true conſtitutional ſecurity againſt the encroachments of prerogative. But ſhould miniſtry adopt a new mode: ſecure of the majority of the legiſlative branches, ſhould it join the executive part to them: ſhould it deceive parliament and the people by falſe information, and modeſtly call it a *pious fraud* *, and then avail themſelves of the

* When the American war was firſt entered on, the miniſter, to impoſe on the country-gentlemen, took

the deciſions of parliament, though given on ſuch grounds, to juſtify their meaſures, where would be the conſtitution? If the people were quiet under it, all would be loſt: if they were alarmed, or if ſome untoward event of war, or ſome great public calamity, ſhould rouſe them to impatience, would they not ſoon find that they are held with golden chains, which will not ſnap, or be eaſily broken?

THESE are evidently the great evils of a popular government, when under too much influence; and where is the remedy againſt it? *Influence* has now given to the

off a ſhilling in the pound from the land-tax. Five thouſand men were ſent to Boſton, under Gen. Gage. When afterwards the large armament was ſent to New York, under Gen. Howe, it was reported, that a noble lord, high in office, declared the ſending five thouſand men was known to be ineffectual; but it was a *pious fraud*, as it was thought the nation would not otherwiſe have engaged in the war.

crown

crown that power which it formerly derived from prerogative; and if, like an irreſiſtable torrent, it bears down the weak mounds patriotiſm can now raiſe againſt it, oppoſition is entirely vain. The ſhortening the duration of parliaments, or the changing the manner of chooſing repreſentatives, are partial and ineffectual applications,

"Which will but ſkin and film the ulcerous part,
"While rank corruption, mining all within,
"Infects unſeen."

THE malady lies deeper; it lies in the character and principles of the people. They have long ſince departed from thoſe maxims of decency, reſpect, and moderation, which are eſſential to the continuance of a free government. If we enquire into the ſeveral cauſes which have produced that change, we ſhall find they have been operating forcibly, though imperceptibly,

tibly, for more than an hundred years; and the enquiry will preſent us with a curious and not unintereſting hiſtory of manners.

## END OF PART I.

# PART II.

WHEN a Britiſh parliament has arrived at the greateſt degree of ſubſerviency, and ſits, as it were, merely to regiſter the edicts of the miniſter, the Britiſh conſtitution has ſtill wiſely left one proviſion for redreſs, in the regular appeal to the people, at the expiration of the parliament. The people cannot, indeed, in this country, call their delegates to account for their paſt ill conduct, as the Romans did; but they have the power, in ſome meaſure, to prevent it for the future; by returning, for their delegates, only ſuch perſons as have diſtinguiſhed themſelves by a faithful diſcharge of the truſt repoſed in them. This proviſion is as prudent as human wiſdom could conceive; but human wiſdom cannot guard againſt fraud. If corruption ſhould ſpread

through all ranks and orders of the people; if the electors ſhould ſet themſelves to ſale to the higheſt bidder; if it be impracticable to prevent bribery by the penalty of laws and the force of oaths, the majeſty of the people will be diſhonoured and deſpiſed, and the voice of the people ceaſe to be the voice of God. As the beſt things perverted become the worſt, ſo a popular government, when it has loſt it's true principle and ſupport, the virtues and moderation of the people, can never be ſuſtained by other props and artificial checks. When the foundation of the noble fabric of liberty is ſapped, it will cruſh thoſe feeble ſtays, as ſtubble and rottenneſs, in it's fall.

THE celebrated Monteſquieu has obſerved, that the principle of a republic is virtue *, and, of courſe, of all governments, as far as they partake of the republican form; or, in other words, of all

* De L'Eſprit des Loix, Liv. iii. ch. 3.

free

free governments. Let us now conſider the manners of this nation, and ſee whether all our habits do not tend, and have not been tending, at leaſt ever ſince the reſtoration, to weaken this principle. "The "Greeks, who lived under a popular go-"vernment," ſays the author juſt mentioned, "were ſuch excellent politicians, "they knew no other power but virtue to "maintain it. Republicans of theſe days "talk of nothing but manufactures, com-"merce, funds, riches, and even of lux-"ury, as the ſupport of the ſtate."

EVERY body knows, that when king Charles II. returned from France, he brought with him all the vices of a moſt licentious court, and indulged himſelf in every kind of ſenſuality, without reſtraint from his rank and character. The example of a king in vice will ſoon pervade his people; though, alas! we now ſee how ſmall the influence of the moſt virtuous example is. It was the faſhion of Charles's court

court to be debauched in the extreme. His wits ridiculed decency on the public ſtage; the ladies laughed without bluſhing, and the people were aſhamed of nothing ſo much as of modeſty and virtue. A reflection on the havock and miſchief the fanatics had made in the preceding reign, under the cloke of religion, rendered all appearances of religion ſuſpected; and even the clergy of thoſe days, though men of the moſt diſtinguiſhed learning, abilities, and piety, that ever graced a nation at any period, even they contributed eventually, through the perverſeneſs of human nature, to the ſame end. The conſtant tenor of their ſermons, wiſely adapted to the times, was againſt hypocriſy, which had prevailed during Cromwell's uſurpation. At length, to avoid and diſcountenance falſe appearances, men ran into the contrary extreme; and by an hypocriſy, if poſſible, more pernicious than the other, they affected to be worſe than they really were. The race of hypocrites of this laſt ſpecies, is increaſed

in the preſent age. England is the only country in the world, chriſtian, mahometan, or pagan, were men are aſhamed of the imputation of reſpecting the eſtabliſhed national religion; or appearing to have any ſenſe of the public worſhip of GOD.

WHATEVER ſceptics may pretend, man is naturally a religious as well as a ſocial creature; and they are bad friends to ſociety, who endeavour, by ſophiſtry and refinement, to diſſolve thoſe ſtrongeſt of all obligations by which religion binds mankind to duty: but in a free ſtate it gives a mortal wound to the conſtitution.

AT the revolution it was neceſſary, for obvious reaſons, to eradicate the doctrine of paſſive obedience, and the *right divine for kings to govern wrong*. The great Mr. Locke, and the great writers of that age, employed their pens to vindicate the rights of the people. But as it may be neceſſary to bend a crooked ſtick too much on the oppoſite

oppoſite ſide, in order to recover its ſtraitneſs, ſome of their arguments were calculated for the moment, and have, perhaps, been carried to too great a length by their followers. The reſolution of all power into the people may be a juſt maxim in theory; but is it not ſubverſive of all ſubordination to recur to it? The powers the people have ordained, if that be the proper phraſe, whether civil or eccleſiaſtical, ſhould ſtill be reſpected for the good of the people *. Through the perverſion of theſe liberal doctrines, is not all reſpect due to character loſt in this country? And, with the reſpect due to character, all authority is loſt; and yet the people muſt be governed by authority, not by reaſoning and argument. The great Roman legiſlator, with

* The principle of a popular government is corrupted, not only when the ſpirit of equality is loſt; but when the people fall into the ſpirit of extreme equality, and every citizen wants to be on a level with thoſe he has choſen to govern him. *L'Eſprit des Loix*, Liv. viii. c. 2.

an

an intimate knowledge of mankind, made the people believe he had an intercourſe with a ſuperior being, who dictated thoſe laws he propoſed to them; intending by that artifice to gain more reverence and eſteem for his inſtitutions. How ridiculous muſt government be, if men were bound to obey no laws till they were firſt convinced, by logical demonſtration, of the neceſſity or propriety of them? In civil ſociety the wiſdom of the governors muſt be the wiſdom of the governed; that opinion is the foundation of authority. In ſhort, men are not angels, governing themſelves by pure reaſon; they have violent, various, and interfering paſſions, which it is the buſineſs of government to reſtrain, and which it muſt reſtrain by authority; and authority muſt be ſupported by decency and manners in a free conſtitution, as it is by force in an abſolute one. But the general effect of the ſpirit of philoſophizing has tended to baniſh every idea of duty and ſubmiſſion in

all

all ranks and ages. Every thing is diſputed, even the parental authority. The ſon, while a ſchool-boy, *reaſons* on the duty of reverencing his father, and *argues* that the extent of obedience ſhould be determined by the meaſure of the advantages, in his opinion, reſulting from it. Poſſibly the logic may be good: but philoſophers are apt to entangle themſelves in the flimſy net of their own ſpeculations: practical truths are commonly obvious, and what is called the moral ſenſe immediately diſcovers them. In a free government example and manners muſt have the force of law.

Not only the progreſs of learning, but the liberty of the preſs, an excellent cauſe, yet being perverted, has conſpired to produce the ſame bad effect: not to mention the immoral publications which the preſs has too often produced, to conſider it only in a political view; it cannot be denied, that the liberty of the preſs is one of

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the moſt precious liberties of this conſtitution ; it is indeed the palladium of all our liberties, could it be preſerved inviolate: but, like every thing human, it is liable to abuſe ; it is equally liable to be proſtituted to corruption and to faction. Miniſterial hirelings, by this means, endeavour to poiſon the principles of the people, by teaching them, (not to ſcorn mock patriots, but) that patriotiſm itſelf is a mockery, and *that not to be corrupted is the ſhame.* On the other hand, men diſappointed in their views of ambition, have by this found the eaſy means of venting their perſonal envy and indignation, under the ſpecious colour of patriotiſm. And thus they mutually agree, though agreeing in nothing elſe, to unſettle the opinions of the people, and to deſtroy their reverence for their governors, which is the foundation of decency ; by impudently aſſerting, that there is no man of honeſty and abilities in any adminiſtration

tion not compoſed of them and their friends.

The increaſe of national commerce has contributed alſo to corrupt the national manners. No one is ignorant that the commerce of England has been increaſing ever ſince the time of queen Elizabeth. But the ſtrides it has taken ſince the year 1748, on account of the prodigious progreſs of civilization in our American colonies; and the vaſt influx of riches from our various conqueſts in the Eaſt Indies, ſince that period, have exceeded all calculation. As wealth has flowed in upon the country, luxury has naturally followed wealth. Perſons who have acquired large property by traffick, not only live in the ſtile, and at as great an expence as the firſt nobility, but they are ſoon able to purchaſe thoſe lands the nobility are obliged to ſell. This is in the natural order of things, where that order is not interrupted

interrupted by ſumptuary laws, or other artificial checks. But trade has its advantages and its evils too. "If we view "commerce in its firſt ſtage," ſays an elegant writer *, "we ſhall ſee that it "ſupplies mutual neceſſities, prevents mutual wants, extends mutual knowledge, "eradicates mutual prejudice, and ſpreads "mutual humanity. If we view it in its "middle and more advanced period, we "ſhall ſee it provides conveniences, increaſes numbers, coins money, gives "birth to arts and ſcience, creates equal "laws, diffuſes general plenty and general "happineſs. If we view it in its third "and higheſt ſtage, we ſhall ſee it change "its nature and effects: it brings in ſuperfluity and vaſt wealth; begets avarice, groſs luxury, or effeminate refinement, among the higher ranks, together with general loſs of principle."

* Eſtimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times.

THUS trade in the extreme, like all things in the extreme, is adverſe to civil liberty, which depends on moderation.

ANOTHER and a very powerful cauſe of the change in the manners of the nation, aroſe from hence: after the revolution, members of parliament were obliged to give longer and more conſtant attendance in parliament than had formerly been expected or practiſed; as it was neceſſary to reſide in the capital for a longer time, they began to find it agreeable to have their families in town likewiſe; this obliged them to have fixed houſes for their town reſidence, inſtead of ſatisfying themſelves with leſs expenſive accommodations, as had been long the cuſtom. And hence one great cauſe of all that exceſs in equipage, furniture, and dreſs, which vanity and emulation excites. In the table, it is ſaid, œconomy has been introduced; but the alteration has affected only the hoſpitality of it; the expence of refinement is

equal

equal now, to the expence of plenty before.

LIVING more in ſociety, eſpecially the mixt ſociety of the ſexes, has created notions of elegance and gallantry, and refined the manners of perſons of quality. But one fatal effect on the national manners, from the occaſions of familiar intercourſe, has been the extreme corruption of the female character. Delicacy would forbid to mention it, but their influence on the other ſex is ſo great and ſo univerſal, it cannot be omitted, in an enquiry like the preſent. Diſſipation and expence have baniſhed the ideas of domeſtic duty and maternal care, among many. Perſonal indulgences engage all their attention. The facility of obtaining divorces, and the confidence which ariſes from numbers, have conſpired to render the loſs of reputation a trifling inconvenience in ſociety; as it is no bar to admiſſion into faſhionable company. There, with a ſmall ſhare of wit,

and a large ſhare of preſumption, high-born beauty is well received without the paſſport of modeſty. It is not meant to inſinuate, that there are no bright examples of female excellence in this age; no age could ever boaſt of brighter. There are characters in the higheſt ſtations, as much diſtinguiſhed by their virtue as by their rank; the national misfortune is, that their numbers are ſo few: they are ſo far from giving the *ton*,

"That in the fatneſs of theſe purſey times
"Virtue itſelf of vice muſt pardon beg,
"Yea, courb and woo for leave to do it good."

From the occaſions of familiar intercourſe, numberleſs effects of extravagance have ariſen, but none more fatal to liberty than the faſhion of gaming; which is evidently more prevalent in this country now, than ever it was at any former period. Moſt other evils have ſome attendant good to balance, in a certain meaſure, the inconveniences ariſing from them: but gaming

ing is productive of more hurt than any other habit, without the poſſibility of producing one beneficial effect, not even a generous vice. This paſſion abſorbs every other in the human breaſt; it is indolence in the extreme; a gameſter is neither a good friend, a good huſband, nor a good father: how then can it be expected he ſhould be a good citizen? or where ſhall we find the virtues neceſſary to ſupport a free government, among a people ſo depraved and loſt to every ſenſe of duty? Theſe reflections are not introduced for the ſake of common-place topics of declamation againſt this vice, which none will defend on principle, though ſo many countenance it by their practice; it is becauſe this faſhion is really one of the greateſt and moſt efficient cauſes of that ſyſtem of manners, that indifference to the public, and that ſelfiſh avarice, which tends directly to the deſtruction of civil liberty; by debaſing all manly character, and corrupting all principle of virtue.

THERE is another cauſe of the preſent change of manners, which muſt more particularly be mentioned, becauſe directly contrary to the genius and principles of our conſtitution, and that is a *ſtanding army*; for ſuch ours may now be called, unleſs by thoſe who are reſolved to diſpute about words *. This is an eſtabliſhment abſolutely

* Even the militia, as it is now managed, is no better than mercenary troops. That which gave the militia its great importance, as the natural defence of the kingdom, was the qualification required from the officers. Men of known property, who have landed intereſt in the county they ſerve for, are the only perſons by the act qualified to command corps; yet by a relaxation of the laws, and through the indulgence of the lord lieutenants of counties, the proper qualifications have not been attended to. It has been ſaid, gentlemen of real property cannot be found for the ſervice. It muſt be confeſt, thoſe gentlemen who expoſe themſelves to the fatigues and inconveniences of a military life, renouncing the perſonal gratifications they might receive from their large fortunes, ſacrifice a great deal to the public. And it is to be feared the public is not ſufficiently grateful; they are too apt to look upon them in the ſame

abſolutely unknown in this country till late years. It is in the memory of many, and in the knowledge of all, how often this eſtabliſhment has been reprobated; and what dangers to the conſtitution and the liberties of the people have been prognoſticated from it. Standing armies, or mercenary troops, appointed by the crown, and independent of the people, were firſt introduced by Charles the Seventh of France into that country, about the middle of the 15th century; and it was a meaſure which conduced more, and more

ſame light as upon thoſe who enter on the military line for an eſtabliſhment. Actuated, however, by a true patriotic principle, gentlemen will diſregard ſuch diſcouragements, and not refuſe the call of honour in the hour of danger. If there be not enough of ſuch exalted minds, it is in vain to expect the virtue which muſt ſave a ſinking country. But if party ſhould run high, as the crown has a power of diſmiſſing all officers, and by that means of garbling the militia *, this circumſtance reduces them to the ſame ſtate of dependency as the regulars.

* 2 Geo. III. ch. 20. ſ. 14.

expeditiouſly, than all others, to overturn the feudal ſyſtem in that kingdom: it occaſioned alſo a moſt important revolution in the affairs and policy of all Europe. By depriving the nobles of that direction of the military force of the ſtate, which had raiſed them to ſuch high authority and importance, a deep wound was given to the feudal ariſtocracy, in that part where its power ſeemed to be moſt complete *.

This ſyſtem being adopted in one country, neceſſity obliged others to follow the example: or they muſt ſoon have been over-run by their neighbours, become more powerful from their ſuperior diſcipline; as the Italian ſtates were over-run by Charles VIII. of France. England, indeed, from its peculiar ſituation, was leſs liable to this danger than moſt other ſtates, and therefore a ſtanding army was

* See Robertſon's Hiſt. of Charles V. vol. 1.

leſs

leſs neceſſary in this iſland, while it remained unconnected with continental politics. But politicians are ſometimes miſled by maxims which may be right at one time and wrong at another, from the change of circumſtances. Continental connexions have been neceſſary to this nation, ſince the extent of its trade and poſſeſſions have been ſo much enlarged. The great miniſter, whoſe plans carried victory to every part of the globe, in the laſt war, did not ſcruple to aſſert, that America was conquered in Germany. His ſucceſſor loſt ſight of, or denied the maxim; we ſee what has been the conſequence in this war. The houſe of Bourbon, left at liberty to turn the ſtreſs of her power to her navy, is become our equal, it is to be feared, at ſea. God grant it may not become our ſuperior!

In the preſent ſtate of this country, it is impoſſible to diſpenſe with a ſtanding army: and yet the increaſe of influence that

that muſt neceſſarily give the crown, is unavoidable. Beſides, ſuch a body is always unfavourable to civil liberty. The military habits are ſo entirely different from the habits of the citizen, that even the moſt liberal of our officers, even they whoſe characters are but partially military, contract the *eſprit du corps*.

This ſlight, but impartial view, will ſhew us the character and manners of the nation, and the cauſes which produce ſuch manners, as naturally as the power of gravitation cauſes the deſcent of heavy bodies to the earth. Let any reaſonable man then be aſked, if he thinks there is public virtue enough to maintain public liberty? We ſee the means of corruption on one ſide, and the diſpoſition to be corrupted on the other; both ariſing from long habit and unavoidable neceſſity. We ſee all orders of men running to exceſs of expence, and thoſe of the higheſt rank and largeſt incomes living beyond their revenues,

nues. The inconveniences ariſing from diſordered finances expoſes thoſe perſons to be bribed by the miniſter; and he is obliged to bribe them even to do right. This infamous traffick is deſtructive of all principle; and men, to juſtify their conduct to others, perhaps to juſtify it to themſelves, feel a propenſity to equivocate in a caſe of the plaineſt duty: and, by falſe arguments, endeavour to give the lie to their own conſcience; *ibi fas, ubi maxima merces.*

But the moſt certain ſymptom of the decline of a free conſtitution is, when party is ſubſtituted for virtue. When oppoſition to government is alone ſufficient to gain the favour of the people; and the blindneſs of faction is not able to diſtinguiſh between the motives of men of deſperate fortunes, and confeſſedly of abandoned principles, and the noble ſteadineſs of men of known fortune and honour, who refuſe all the emoluments of place

and

and office, rather than lend their names to juſtify meaſures, in their opinion, deſtructive to their country. When, by an undiſtinguiſhing ſupport of unprincipled impoſtors, the people have proſtituted their favour, their favour will no longer be able to ſupport the true patriot: and the miniſter will not even affect to treat them with reſpect. They will find they have loſt all their weight in the government; their name will be uſed to give a ſanction to the moſt arbitrary acts, while volumes of prayers from them will ſcarcely obtain the ſhadow of relief: even petitions for objects the moſt popular, for objects of acknowledged neceſſity, enquiries into the public expences, will be treated with inſult, or anſwered only by mock-enquiries. Perhaps, to mortify the people ſtill more; to convince them how inſignificant they are, how light they are found in the political balance, they will ſee men who have been ſtigmatized in the face of their country, for the moſt diſhonourable conduct in their profeſſions,

profeſſions, promoted to poſts of truſt and honour in the ſtate, for their ſubſerviency to the miniſtry, even while the ill ſavour of their actions ſtinks in the noſtrils of the people.

CAN we, after this, be told that the Britiſh ſpirit has maintained the Britiſh liberty for ages, and will continue to ſupport it. "This ſpirit, however great," as a diſtinguiſhed political writer has ſaid *, "will never be able to ſupport itſelf "againſt that immenſe property which is "now lodged in the king, and which is "ſtill increaſing. Upon a moderate com-"putation, there are near three millions "at the diſpoſal of the crown," (the ſum is much greater now). "The civil liſt "amounts to near a million; the col-"lection of all taxes to another mil-"lion; and the employments in the army

* Hume's Eſſay, IX. "Whether the Britiſh go-"vernment inclines more to abſolute monarchy, or "to a republic,"

"and

" and navy, along with eccleſiaſtical pre-
" ferments, to above a third million. A
" monſtrous ſum! and what may fairly be
" computed to be more than a thirtieth
" part of the whole income and labour of
" the kingdom. When we add to this
" immenſe property the increaſing luxury
" of the nation, our proneneſs to corrup-
" tion, along with the great power and
" prerogatives of the crown, and the com-
" mand of ſuch numerous military forces,
" there is no one but muſt deſpair, with-
" out extraordinary efforts, of being able
" to ſupport our free government much
" longer under all theſe diſadvantages."

Are a people, ſuch as they whoſe character we have been conſidering, capable of *extraordinary efforts* in the cauſe of freedom, and of their country? Will there be found virtue and purity enough in ſuch a nation as this to ſupport their liberty? That they now enjoy the moſt perfect liberty any nation is bleſt with, is wholly

owing to the perſonal virtues of the PRINCE on the throne; and his moderation is their only ſecurity for it.

"A dependency of the two houſes of "parliament on the crown, is as effectual "a ſubverſion of the conſtitution, as an ab-"ſolute aboliſhment of parliaments would "be." This moſt oracular ſentence was pronounced half a century ago. It was then treated by many as an idle prophecy; ſhould men ſee it literally fulfilled, they would perhaps pay ſome attention and reverence to it. But the fears of danger from changes in a ſtate, alarm moſt when at the greateſt diſtance, and diminiſh as the danger approaches. When, immediately after the revolution, a cry was heard of the increaſing influence of the crown, ſeveral acts were framed to guard againſt it; by diſqualifying perſons poſſeſt of places from ſitting in parliament: now a majority is obtained by influence, will they not be able to defeat every means of diminiſhing

diminiſhing that influence, even though they themſelves, by a formal declaration, ſhould determine it to be too great?

If any perſon was to be hardy enough at this time, to recommend ſetting aſide parliaments, as a uſeleſs, gothic, and corrupt part of the conſtitution, he would be looked upon by all as a viſionary, or as a madman who ſhould deſtroy himſelf to avoid death. Added to the natural prejudice which all men have in favour of their own country, their own laws and inſtitutions, the Engliſh have been flattered with hearing high encomiums on their government, even from foreigners. It has been called the moſt perfect ſyſtem that ever exiſted; where all the parts are ſo nicely tempered as to balance each other; where, the king being the ſole executive power, and with his parliament the legiſlative, there is in this happy mixture all the advantages reſulting from the wiſdom

of

of many, and the deciſion and activity of one.

THESE phraſes ſound very finely; but if parliaments are corrupted, what do they amount to in reality? While England had no conſiderable territories out of the iſland, and indeed only the half of the iſland; while ſhe had no foreign trade, no manufactures, and agriculture was almoſt neglected; while the only foreign enemies ſhe had to contend with, were the French, againſt whom ſhe acted always on the offenſive; and the Scotch, whom the forces of a few northern chieftains were generally ſufficient to repel; and while the king himſelf had a diſputed title to the crown; the only policy neceſſary in the miniſters, who were commonly eccleſiaſtics, was to ſecure a few of the moſt powerful barons, and with them to overawe the reſt. This was eaſily effected, by a little intrigue, to excite and maintain jealouſies among the nobles. The ordi-

nary expences of government were chiefly defrayed by the crown lands, and other fixed revenues, and aids were ſeldom required from the people.

How unlike this is to the preſent ſtate of the kingdom, needs not to be mentioned: Is it not poſſible, therefore, that a government which might be as perfect as the warmeſt encomiaſts are pleaſed to call it, in one ſituation of the nation, may be very inadequate, very deſtructive in another and different ſituation? Beſides, parliaments, even the pureſt, have their defects, like other inſtitutions. If we conſider the ſupremacy of the Britiſh parliament as extending over all the dominions of the Britiſh crown, we may ſoon ſee the diſadvantages ariſing from the nature of ſuch a government, when applied to ſo extenſive, ſo diſtant, ſo diſparted an empire. The forms of it muſt be complicated and ſlow; ſecrecy cannot be kept; diſpatch cannot be made; nor any meaſures ſteadily purſued.

But it will be ſaid, parliament is the great council of the nation; and herein conſiſts the advantage reſulting from the wiſdom of many. If the words are fairly examined, in what does this wiſdom conſiſt? Suppoſe, for the ſake of argument, five hundred and fifty men, all perſons of the moſt upright characters, and cleareſt underſtanding; ſuppoſe them unbiaſſed by intereſt or by paſſion; ſuppoſe they mean fairly and honeſtly the good of the nation at large, ſacrificing all local attachments to general advantage: could it then poſſibly be ſuppoſed, that the majority of theſe five hundred and fifty men would be ſufficiently acquainted with the conſtitution of the country, its laws and cuſtoms, and its various intereſts, to be able to adviſe what is moſt fit to be done? or is it in the nature of chances, that thoſe perſons who are ſo informed, will fortunately compoſe the majority? But granting even this; can the ſecret ſprings and motives which often determine the moſt important mat-

ters of ſtate, be truſted with ſuch a majority? and could they give proper advice without being perfectly informed of *all* circumſtances?

As this is impoſſible, even in ſpeculation, let it be conſidered what does happen in reality, and what is the practical manner of collecting this *wiſdom of the many*. A queſtion being propoſed in the houſe for their wiſe deliberation, and properly ſeconded, the oppoſite party makes objections to it. Speeches, frequently ſet ſpeeches, are formally pronounced, which, according to the apparent importance of the point, or the love the orator has to be heard, are from twenty minutes to two hours long each. Here as much is ſaid on other ſubjects, or more, than on the queſtion before them; and, by the help of tireſome repetitions, the debate is lengthened out from three hours, to ten or twelve. At the cloſe of theſe harangues, new information being ſeldom given to guide men's judgments, each man votes preciſely

preciſely as he had determined before he came into the houſe, and divides with his own party. That ſide, which then has the majority, of courſe, has *the wiſdom of the many*.

Speech-making, which does not mean to convince, but merely to amuſe, if not to deceive, becomes at leaſt as ridiculous at St. Stephen's chapel, as at Coach-makers hall. It were well if it ended in the ridicule, and was not attended with ſerious miſchiefs: but for this paltry talent, for this faculty to amuſe, which would be meritorious in a buffoon, the ſenator is eſteemed, as if it included every kind of knowledge, and all qualities, requiſite in a ſtateſman. And men of a profeſſion which leads to oratory, though not always men of ſuperior abilities, and commonly of the moſt confined education, whoſe chief habits are to *puzzle right, and varniſh wrong*, and whoſe chief knowledge is the practical part of the law, have of late years had too much weight in determining upon

the great commercial and political intereſts of a vaſtly-extended empire, the bare geography of which they ſcarcely underſtand. And this is what compoſes *the wiſdom of the many!*

But does not this practice of debating, inſtead of ſerving to elucidate and promote, in reality impede, all public buſineſs, and neceſſarily clog every effort the ableſt and moſt upright miniſter could make? Or, indeed, diſtract his thoughts, and add new difficulties to an office, arduous enough in itſelf; while he is obliged to be more attentive to ſecure a vote, by means of a little place in the ſtamp-office, than to concert a treaty of commerce and alliance with a foreign ſtate.

Let a man who has ſeen the *routine* of the buſineſs of a miniſter, a *premier*, as he is called, conſider his ſituation in this country. As ſoon as he riſes in the morning, he is beſet by a ſwarm of clamorous ſuitors,

ſuitors, who, for their ſubſerviency in parliament, think themſelves entitled to aſk any favours, however unreaſonable; theſe perſons, at leaſt many of them, he muſt flatter, and make up by careſſes and promiſes, for what he cannot poſſibly grant. This buſineſs diſpatched, he muſt attend his royal maſter in private; to him he muſt endeavour to repreſent all his affairs as flouriſhing and proſperous; his people as happy, and ſatisfied with the adminiſtration; his enemies as terrified at his warlike preparations; and all his revolted ſubjects as waiting only for protection to return, with one conſent, to their duty and allegiance. He muſt repreſent the perſons he wiſhes to employ as the only perſons in the kingdom capable of the places he propoſes for them; taking care always to hint, that they who are averſe to his adminiſtration are enemies to his Majeſty's perſon, in order to make their perſons odious to his Majeſty. As ſoon as he comes out of the cloſet, he ſees his brethren at-

tending for their turn of admiſſion; to all theſe he muſt ſpeak, and take care to prepare them, and give them their cue, that they may ſay nothing in contradiction to what he has been aſſerting.

The next ſcene you behold him in is, in the houſe of commons. Here he muſt ſit and hear all his meaſures, right or wrong, cenſured; and all accidental miſfortunes attributed to his meaſures; in which, to make him ſome amends, he is often credited for deſign where he really had none. All the diſtraction and diſcontents at home, all the loſſes and diſgraces abroad, are aſcribed to his ignorance, obſtinacy, duplicity, and indolence. He muſt hear himſelf perſonally abuſed, and probably his neareſt friends and relations; whom he will be told he has been ſolicitous to enrich with the plunder of a ruined nation.

In this ſituation, certainly unpleaſant, though

though ſometimes he may feign a laugh, he is frequently obliged to continue till midnight, often till later: at length he returns home, fatigued in body and mind, takes ſome ſhort refreſhment, and endeavours in ſleep to forget the cares of the day. The ſame round he purſues the next day, and the next; and ſuch days now continue nine months in the year, for ſo long does the parliament ſit. — Is it poſſible, in the nature of things, for a man thus perſecuted and embarraſſed, to find time for real buſineſs? to plan and digeſt the meaſures neceſſary for the government of a vaſt empire? to attend to all the circumſtances that ariſe, and to inform himſelf of all the deſigns and ſecret intrigues of foreign courts, as well as to make the proper arrangements for ſuch complicated affairs at home?

If we were to judge of what parliaments will do, from what they have ever done, we

we ſhould not, perhaps, be too ſanguine in our hopes, or expect too much from them. Almoſt the only important and conſtitutional ſtand parliament ever made againſt the regal power, was in the early part of Richard the Second's reign, when they obliged him to deliver up his favourites, before they would grant him any ſubſidies. This glorious aſſembly was ſtigmatized by the name of *the mercileſs parliament*. The monarch, after he came of age, found means to obtain parliaments more at his devotion. The *parliament of Shrewſbury*, in 1398, ſoon undid all the preceding one had done, and carried the royal prerogative to an exorbitant pitch. Hiſtorians remark, that it was at that time the packing parliaments was firſt ſet on foot; and the miniſters found the means of having ſuch members returned as were agreeable to them, and ſubſervient to their views.

It

It is certain parliaments are an inſtitution of very great advantage to the kingdom; being the only ſupport of the liberties of the people, who, without that, would long ſince have fallen into a fatal ſtate of ſlavery. But on the other hand, it cannot be denied, that theſe aſſemblies become very dangerous, when influenced by popular factions, or by the cabals of an ambitious prince. Accordingly, it has often happened, that inſtead of procuring the good of the realm, they have produced nothing but confuſion, and the ſubverſion of the laws: one while bringing too low the prerogative royal; another while, by carrying it higher than is conſiſtent with the welfare of the nation. For this reaſon it rarely happens that ſuch evils can be remedied, but by means as violent as thoſe made uſe of to produce them; hence civil wars generally enſue. This is one of the principal cauſes of the domeſtic troubles which have all along afflicted England more than any other European ſtate.

ſtate. The reflection is Rapin's *; it is candid, and worthy our attention.

It is not expected the ſyſtem of aboliſhing parliaments will be adopted in practice, tho' it may be allowed that a corrupt parliament is more dangerous to liberty than none. Even admitting it would be advantageous to the nation, a nation cannot at once ſee the advantages propoſed by any eſſential change, and therefore prudence would make them cautious of trying the experiment; and there will be always ſtill more objections ariſing from prejudice, intereſt, and pride. Reformation is a work of time, and is more frequently brought to paſs by circumſtances and accident, than by any previous and ſettled plan. Was ſuch a ſyſtem propoſed, the miniſter, the parliament, and the people, would unite againſt it. For

* Hiſt. of Eng. Tindal's tranſ. 8vo. vol. IV. p. 433.

though

though the miniſter might at leſs trouble and expence influence a ſmall number than a large one: yet when influenced, the large one will be his broadeſt and firmeſt ſupport. And the parliament, though an enormous ſum might be ſaved for the national exigencies, yet will chuſe rather to have the chance of catching ſomething in the general ſcramble. The people, who are commonly bigotted to words, will be deſirous to retain the form of that government they have long been accuſtomed to, and while they graſp the ſhadow, will not perceive that they have loſt the ſubſtance. The moſt arbitrary of the Roman emperors did not aboliſh the ſenate, tho' one of them made his horſe a conſul.

THIS ſpeculation, however, may have its uſe, and an important uſe, to quiet the minds of men under the preſent ſituation of affairs, and their burthenſome load of taxes; and to leſſen the animoſity they

are apt to bear to all miniſters, however upright and diſintereſted; by ſhewing that the nation has been brought into this ſtate by a ſtrong concatenation of cauſes and effects. It may alſo convince reaſonable and candid men, who are poſſibly acting on the pureſt motives, that aſſociations are vain attempts to remedy evils, which no human efforts can cure, unleſs they endeavour to make a total change in the manners and habits of the people, and reſtore the long-exploded virtue, the love of our country. The only aſſociation which can ſave this kingdom, is an aſſociation of the good and great of all parties and denominations (and of all parties there are many ſuch) to revive the loſt virtues and principles of the conſtitution.

The great reſult, therefore, of this ſpeculation, ſhould be to enforce in the ſtrongeſt manner, on the minds of the people, the abſolute, the indiſpenſable neceſſity, at this important moment, to

avail

avail themſelves of the preſent general election, in order to make choice of ſuch repreſentatives as are men of property, virtue, and approved integrity; perſons who, in their public character, will not oppoſe men but meaſures; and inflexibly oppoſe them, when they are contrary to the good of the nation. A vicious man will never be faithful to his truſt, when it is his intereſt to betray it; for vice is in its nature ſelfiſh. If the people wiſh to preſerve that birth-right of Engliſhmen, thoſe glorious privileges which diſtinguiſh the ſubjects of this government from the reſt of the world, the people themſelves muſt look with contempt on the treacherous bribe which would corrupt them; and hold in abhorrence thoſe who offer, and thoſe who accept it. They muſt reſolve, in their public and private conduct, to be guided by the maxims of reſpect, decency, and moderation. This important moment calls for great exertions and great perſonal ſacrifices. Other-

wiſe, it is to be feared, the pangs of expiring liberty will only produce thoſe violent ſtruggles, which, in the diſſolution of free governments, draw the cords that bind the people tighter, while they endeavour to break thro' the toils.

*Sit cæca futuri*
*Mens hominum fati ; liceat ſperare timenti !*

THE END.